



9: Warning: Hold Fast

"[Jesus] ...whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.

Therefore, as the Holy Spirit says:

"Today, if you will hear His voice,
Do not harden your hearts as in the rebellion,
In the day of trial in the wilderness,
Where your fathers tested Me, tried Me,
And saw My works forty years.
Therefore I was angry with that generation,
And said, 'They always go astray in their heart,
And they have not known My ways.'
So I swore in My wrath,
'They shall not enter My rest.'"

Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing from the living God."

Hebrews 3:6b – 11

Moses was a faithful servant in God's household: Jesus is a faithful Son and the household belongs to Him, which in anybody's book makes Jesus better than Moses. With that established, once again the writer of the book of Hebrews breaks from his main line of thought to warn his readers about how dangerous it would be not to give Jesus His rightful place.

We Are Family

To belong to Jesus' house, or household, is to be family. To belong to Jesus' household means that God is our Father, Jesus is our elder Brother; angels are our servants, and we are heirs of the Kingdom: "heirs of God, and joint heirs with Christ." (Romans 8:17). The writer has already suggested in passing that we belong to Jesus' household when he addressed us as "holy brethren" in verse 1. Here, by way of warning, He adds

that we belong to Jesus' household: the same household within which Moses was a servant if, and only if, "we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end."

- ◆ *What does it mean to belong to Jesus' household?*

The Hope

Hope, has to do with the unseen and the future. Hope, in Biblical thought, is not wishful thinking. It is the confident expectation of good things to come. It's confident expectation because it's based on promises that cannot fail. Our hope is heaven: "the hope of His calling... the riches of the glory of His inheritance in the saints" (Ephesians 1:18).

The Confidence Of The Hope

Our hope is based on promises made by God, so it ought not to give way at the first sign of opposition; it's a hope to be held on to with firm, manly boldness and one to be spoken of without fear or hesitation. Such is the confidence of our hope.

The Rejoicing Of The Hope

Rejoicing, glorying or boasting in our hope should be a given. Whatever may be going on with us just now, it's a hope to rejoice in.

"For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."

Romans 8:18

"Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. For our light affliction which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal."

2 Corinthians 4:16-18

Hold Fast: Firm To The End

We are warned then to "hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end." In other words, whatever happens we must remain confident of it, speak freely of it and continue to rejoice in it. We must hold tight to our hope and not let go til we get to the end: the end of this life.

- ◆ *What might that tenacious holding on to the confidence and rejoicing of our hope look like in everyday life?*

Is This A Condition?

Does this mean that belonging to the family is conditional? Well yes, we belong to Jesus' household if, and only if, "we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope." But you mustn't take it to mean that you could lose your place in the family if you lose your confidence or stop rejoicing. To think that would be to forget what the Bible has to say in so many other places about the security of our position in Christ.

Better to see it this way. None but those who, "hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end," have ever really belonged to God's family. That means that if we can see evidence of "confidence and rejoicing of the hope" even when things are tough, then we have reason to be assured that we belong: we're the real thing. Equally it means that we can only be assured of our place in the family to the degree to which we continue to "hold fast".

Never the less, although these thoughts about assurance are important, we must remember that it was not the writers purpose here to make a statement about our security in Christ. He wrote this intending that it should stand as a strong exhortation to persevere with confidence in our hope of heaven and that we should continue to rejoice in that hope, whatever. He also intended it to stand as a strong warning of the very real danger we would be in if we should fail to do so.

An Old Testament Example

Having laid out the nub of his second warning in this way the writer of Hebrews now goes on to develop his point more fully. He begins with a further warning and an example, both drawn from the Old Testament. It's a warning God gave to Israel and the example is of what happened to their fathers when they, who considered themselves to belong to the household, didn't hold fast to their hope.

Verses 7–11 quote Psalm 95:7–11. The quote is introduced with the words, "Therefore, just as the Holy Spirit says...". Clearly the writer believes these words are God's words.

Psalm 95 begins with a call to rejoice in God. The part that's quoted here begins with a warning to heed that call:

"Today, if you will hear His voice,
Do not harden your hearts

Psalm 95:7– 8

The Psalm continues by showing what can happen to those who don't heed the call to rejoice. It points to what happened when a previous generation refused to believe and obey God after He promised them the land of Canaan. He brought them out of Egypt to take them there but in spite of God's promise, in spite of all His help along the way, in spite of many many blessings and miracles that proved that He was with them caring for them and protecting them, they kept going astray. They never really paid proper heed to what God said: their hearts were hard. You know the story: the story of the Exodus.

The Psalmist says that in the hardness of their hearts they tested God — made experiments with Him — to see if He was all that He claimed to be and to see if He really meant what He said. They did that for forty years — "always going astray in their hearts." — and God was angry with them. The word "angry" means grieved, burdened down or exhausted.

Albert Barnes, in his commentary makes the point that forty years was more than enough to demonstrate that their tendency to go astray was a fixed state of character. Israel had more than enough time to show change. They were shown by their behaviour to be radically and habitually evil and they persistently refused to listen to God and learn His ways. Their hearts were hard.

- ◆ *In what ways is the story of the Exodus a picture of the Christian life?*

God's Wrath

The sentence God pronounced is presented in the form of an oath. It was pronounced in wrath and it was final and irreversible.

"So I swore in My wrath,
'They shall not enter My rest.'"

Hebrews 3:10

When we speak of God's wrath we must be careful not to draw too close a parallel with human anger. Wrath is God's reaction to sin. It's a consistent unchanging reaction. It is a judicial act — to experience God's wrath is the just penalty for sin. The strength of God's wrath is depicted in terms of fierce burning and it continues unabated for eternity.

In Conclusion

So we have an example of people who did not "hold fast the confidence and rejoicing of the hope firm to the end". Instead they tried and provoked God by continually going astray because their hearts were hard. The result was a dreadful sentence pronounced by God. the writer of Hebrews concludes from that example that we must be careful lest we should end up like them.

"Beware, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief in departing
from the living God."

Hebrews 3:6b – 11

- ◆ *What thoughts does this passage stir up for you?*